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### SHATTERED HUDSON'S AMAZING FLIGHT

This is the story of an aircraft that was "nearly shipwrecked", and yet flew home - a story of an escape and a flight of endurance, unique of its kind.

The aircraft, a Lockheed Hudson of the R.A.F. Coastal Command, on offensive patrol in a Norwegian fjord, was flying so low that it was holed by a projecting rock on a small island. By all the rules, it should have gone straight into the sea. Instead it flew back to this country, over 300 miles of sea. Then, after prolonging the journey to prevent danger to a village, it crash-landed without injury to the crew.

This Hudson aircraft is one of a Coastal Command squadron which has been successfully harassing the sea supply route along the Norwegian coast to the Nazi armies in North Russia.

It was looking for any shipping of this kind which might be skulking in a deep Norwegian fjord. The aircraft, twisting, diving, climbing round light-houses and small islands, had already penetrated 45 miles into the fjord, searching every nook and cranny.

Suddenly there came a crash. A large hole was knocked in the bottom of the aircraft, near the rear turret, and the force of the impact jerked off the roof of the pilot's cabin.

The propellers were bent by the blow. The port engine back-fired with a loud explosion and a belch of flame from the carburettor intake - and then stopped.

The aircraft had struck a rock on one of the little islands that dot the surface of the fjord.

The crew thought for a second or two, that they had hit the sea, and instinctively they prepared to clamber out. Then, to their amazement, they found they were still in the air.

"Even so", said the pilot later, "I felt sure we had 'bought it'! Our only possible chance seemed to be to attempt to alight on the water, take to the dinghy, and trust to the likelihood that the Norwegian people in the nearby fishing villages would be friendly."

But just as he was preparing to put down on the water, the port engine suddenly picked up again. The pilot pulled gingerly on the controls, and, to his delight, the Lockheed Hudson started to climb. The bent propellers did not seem to handicap its flight at all.

There was just a chance they might get home. The pilot headed his aircraft towards the west.

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It was a chance that had to be taken quickly, however. Everything weighty and moveable would have to be jettisoned at once, to reduce the weight. The pilot issued his instructions over the inter-comm., and called to the rear gunner to come forward and lend a hand. The rear gunner stepped quickly out of the turret - and only just saved himself from stepping right through the great hole in the floor, and falling out altogether. The rest of the crew made a joke about that.

What they most wanted to jettison, of course, was the bombs. That could not be done. The bomb doors had been crushed when the Hudson hit the island, and no amount of effort, by hand, or by the electrical release gear, sufficed to shift them.

The pilot, the navigator and the wireless operator then concentrated on the task of finding their way home. The charts had all been blown through the hole in the roof into the fjord. The radio, upset by the impact, was very shaky, and not until they were thirty miles from the Norwegian coast could the wireless operator get it to work at all. Even when he did, he could only manage to send out faint S.O.S. signals.

He kept them up, however, for 90 minutes. Only one S.O.S. was heard at a British aerodrome but that one was sufficient to have all preparations made for landing.

They navigated in the dark back across the North Sea. "By common sense and guesswork," as the pilot put it. It was anxious flying, particularly for the pilot in his roofless cabin. The others stripped off their gloves, coats and scarves, and wrapped them round the pilot to keep him warm at the controls.

And they made it.

With a big hole in the floor and part of the roof missing, with bent propellers and one dubious engine, with no charts and a damaged radio, they made a landfall at the Shetlands.

Lights had been turned on everywhere at the Shetlands to help them to land - the one S.O.S. that had been picked up was responsible for that.

But the pilot hesitated for a moment, and then flew on.

"I could not judge the speed of my aircraft," he explained later, "so I might have stalled, and crashed on the houses."

"That wouldn't have done any good to the people living in them," he joked, "or to me."

So he flew on towards the mainland of Scotland where he knew an aerodrome at which he could attempt a landing without endangering other people.

There was still the problem of navigation. Now the Navy lent a hand. The Hudson flew near some warships, and the navigator flashed an S.O.S. on the Aldis lamp.

The navy saw, understood, and guessed where the aircraft wanted to land. The vessels turned on all their searchlights, and swung them, like great pointing fingers, on the course the aircraft should follow.

So the Hudson came to the aerodrome on the mainland, and the pilot decided to make a crash landing.

The crew threw open the escape doors, so that they could make a jump for it, if necessary, when they hit ground. Then they braced themselves against the bulkhead - all but the wireless operator, who continued to operate his radio-telephone set. They had to pull him forcibly down beside them.

The Hudson crash-landed on its belly and skidded along the runway on its loaded bomb rack. It nearly over-ran the aerodrome altogether. But a portable petrol pump conveniently got in the way, and nobody suffered more than a few bruises.